

the RED CUP

Q&A



separating alcohol fact from fiction
EVERY TUESDAY IN THE DAILY WILDCAT

Q How accurate are surveys that measure the number of students drinking alcohol on campus?

A. These statistics come from the annual Health & Wellness Survey, administered by Campus Health every spring semester. This anonymous survey is considered quite accurate and goes out to a random selection of classes across campus, as it has for over a decade.

The survey asks questions related to alcohol and other drug use, sexual health, sleep, stress, nutrition, physical activity, violence, and mental health, among other topics. This past year, there were 2,931 undergraduate respondents. Here are few questions we've been asked:

There are 39,000 students at the UA – how can your survey generalize about them with only 2,900 respondents? The magic that makes this work is the fact that the survey is administered to a *random* sample of classes. In fact, 2,900 is a huge number of responses relative to a student population of around 39,000. Case in point: most national polls that look at trends, beliefs or behaviors among the 310 million Americans have only 1,500 or fewer randomly sampled respondents. Additional responses don't increase accuracy much and surveying more costs time and money.

Don't people just lie on surveys? Self-report data, especially if it is anonymous, has been shown to be accurate. Alcohol, sleep, and stress don't tend to be taboo subjects for most people. On the other hand, asking about sexually transmitted diseases might be, and the results will largely reflect that.

Why do you do these surveys? Survey data helps us gauge the overall health of UA students. It allows us to make our programs more effective and more relevant. It also gives us accurate information that we can share. Rather than going on perceptions alone (which we all know can be misleading), having the facts can help students make more informed decisions.

Here at Campus Health, we have found that in-class surveys offer a good snapshot of the health of UA students. That being said, no survey is perfect and anyone who suggests otherwise should have you raising red flags. When it comes to statistics, asking questions related to "who, what, where, when, why, and how" are always good ideas.

Chan, D. (2009). So why ask me? Are self report data really that bad? In Charles E. Lance and Robert J. Vandenberg (Eds.), *Statistical and methodological myths and urban legends: Doctrine, verity and fable in the organizational and social sciences* (pp 309-335).



wildfact

18,892 UA students have responded to the annual Health & Wellness survey over the past decade.



Got a question about alcohol?

Email it to redcup@email.arizona.edu



www.health.arizona.edu

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